

Message Text

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17

ACTION EA-10

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, AS

SUBJ: OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN HINTS AT EARLY NATIONAL
ELECTIONS

1. AT PRESS CONFERENCE IN MELBOURNE JAN 30 OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN INDICATED HE WAS IN FAVOR OF AN EARLY GENERAL ELECTION AND SAID CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD FORCE OPPOSITION TO MAKE A DECISION SOON. ASKED IF THE OPPOSITION WOULD FORCE AN ELECTION BE REJECTING THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPLY BILL (I.E., A FORM OF APPROPRIATIONS BILL) IN THE SENATE, SNEDDEN SAID THIS WOULD BE CONSIDERED. SNEDDEN WENT ON TO WARN THAT AUSTRALIA COULD SOON BE FACING A NEW ECONOMIC CRISIS QTE WITH EVEN HIGHER INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT END QTE. HE SAID THIS COULD BECOME A REALITY QTE IF MEASURES TO BOOST THE PRIVATE SECTOR ARE NOT OFFSET BY A REDUCTION IN GROWTH OF GOVERNMENT SPENDING. END QTE.

2. IN A SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT, THE LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS DECIDED THAT THE NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, TO BEGIN FEB 11, WILL CONSIST OF ONLY SEVEN SITTING WEEKS (OF FOUR DAYS EACH), WITH TWO BREAKS OF FOUR WEEKS AND THREE WEEKS, TO CONCLUDE MAY 29. IF THE GOVERNMENT HAS FINISHED ITS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM BY THE END OF MAY, PARLIAMENT WILL THEN ADJOURN UNTIL

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THE BUDGET IS BROUGHT DOWN IN MID-AUGUST.

3. COMMENT. THESE TWO DEVELOPMENTS TEND TO SET THE PARAMETERS FOR THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.

4. ON THE ONE HAND, SNEDDEN MUST CONTINUE TO HOLD OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF EARLY ELECTIONS, BOTH TO MAINTAIN OPPOSITION MORALE AND TO MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON THE LABOR GOVERNMENT. (MOREOVER, AS HE PROBABLY FACES ANOTHER CHALLENGE FROM FRASER FOR OPPOSITION LEADERSHIP IN THE NEXT MONTH OR TWO, SNEDDEN MUST CONTINUE AT LEAST TO APPEAR TO BE PRESSING FOR ELECTIONS, OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEEMING TO SHRINK FROM AN ELECTORAL CONFRONTATION UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES APPEARING TO FAVOR THE OPPOSITION.) THE LABOR GOVERNMENT, SEEKING TO RIDE OUT PRESENTLY UNFAVORABLE TRENDS, APPEARS TO BE PREPARED TO CUT BACK ITS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM IN ORDER TO PRESENT AS SMALL A TARGET AS POSSIBLE TO OPPOSITION. A SHORT PARLIAMENTARY SESSION MEANS RELATIVELY FEW BILLS PRESENTED WHICH WOULD RISK REJECTION IN THE SENATE. A SHORT PARLIAMENTARY SESSION ALSO MEANS THAT THE OPPOSITION WILL HAVE LESS ACCESS TO THE MEDIA THAN IS THE CASE WHEN PARLIAMENT IS SITTING.
HARROP

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